

Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan 2019-2028

Fact Sheet

Management Plan History

- First plan in the late-1990's, individual plans for each reservoir
- 10-year plans implanted in 2000 and 2009
 - Previous plans developed by citizen workgroups to consider management alternatives
- Convened a 7-member scoping committee to update current version of the plan
 - Scoping committee met twice during summer 2018
 - Public scoping meetings were held in Great Falls (13 in attendance), Butte (0 attendance), Bozeman (1 attendance), Helena (15 attendance), and Townsend (1 attendance).

Proposed Changes for the Draft 2019 Management Plan

1. Reduce Canyon Ferry yellow perch goal to three-year average catch of 6 yellow perch per net in the summer sinking gillnet series
 - Average yellow perch catch from 2000-2017 = 6.0/net
 - Perch abundance has slowly trended upward since 2011
 - Lower perch goal expected to maintain winter perch fishery while maintaining adequate abundance as a primary forage species
 - Lower trigger thresholds would remain at three-year average catch of 3 perch per net (below this trigger additional management prescriptions are recommended)
 - Upper trigger thresholds would decrease to three-year average of 9 perch per net (above this trigger additional management prescriptions are recommended)
 - Setting perch goal at 6 per net allows additional flexibility for management of size and quality for perch and walleye
 - Generally supported during public scoping
2. Incorporate actions from 2012 Northern pike Environmental Assessment into the management plan
 - Final decision for Northern pike suppression in the upper Missouri River system was issued after the 2009 management plan was finalized
 - Maintains actions to reduce expansion of the Northern pike population in the system
 - Widely supported during public scoping
3. Use proportional stock density (PSD) to evaluate size criteria for Canyon Ferry and Holter walleye populations
 - PSD is the proportion of walleye greater than 15-inches divided by the total number of walleye greater than 10-inches
 - Typically, a PSD between 30-60 represents a "balanced" fishery, with a good number of small and large fish with multiple age classes represented
 - A PSD value below 30 is a population consisting of mostly small fish with few large fish
 - A PSD value above 60 is a population consisting of mostly large fish with few small fish available to replace larger fish which are harvested or die naturally

- PSD is recognized criteria typically used to evaluate sport fisheries, and is commonly used to evaluate walleye populations in North America
 - Recommend PSD range 30-50 for Canyon Ferry
 - Recommend PSD range 40-60 for Holter
 - PSD is a secondary management objective. Walleye management changes to modify PSD will not be considered if triggers are exceeded for walleye, perch, or rainbow trout
 - Use of PSD to evaluate walleye size structure was generally supported during public scoping
4. Reevaluate fisheries management strategies if stocking of catchable size (greater than 7-inch) rainbow trout is not restored to previous levels.
- Budget cuts in 2017 resulted in half the typical number of rainbow trout stocked in Canyon Ferry, Hauser, and Holter Reservoirs
 - Rainbow trout stocking is necessary to maintain the fishery due to limited spawning habitat in the reservoirs.
 - FWP will ask legislature for authority to allocate funding to stock at previous levels
 - FWP already has the money available, but needs legislative authority to spend
 - Due to time required to grow fish in the hatchery, stocking of catchable fish at previous levels may not occur until late 2019 or 2020.
 - Much discussion about this issue during public scoping; stocking of catchable sized fish widely supported
5. Holter walleye tournament
- In 2017, FWP denied an open water tournament application for Holter based on criteria outlined in the 2009 management plan. That denial was appealed and upheld by the FWP Commission, with the direction to evaluate this issue during the current plan update.
 - The 2009 plan prescribed no walleye tournaments as long as slot limits were in place. FWP staff interpreted the length restriction of 1 fish greater than 25-inches like a slot limit, so the tournament application was denied.
 - For the Draft 2019 management plan, FWP staff recommends no open water or ice fishing tournaments for Holter Reservoir.
 - Limited access points and constricted areas (from Gates of the Mountains to Split Rock) lead to high concentrations of boats in some areas and would likely instigate conflict with non-tournament boaters and cause safety concerns.
 - A catch and release open water walleye tournament would likely have minimal impacts to the overall population, but a tournament during the pre-spawn period (early spring) could negatively impact individual spawning fish.
 - Due to safety concerns from highly variable ice conditions on Holter, holding ice fishing tournaments are not recommended.
 - In the draft plan, tournament organizers may petition the FWP Commission to allow an open water tournament but must specifically address how they will minimize conflicts with other boaters and address other safety concerns.
 - Discussion of this topic during public scoping was mostly split, with some favoring a tournament on Holter, while others were opposed.

Other Comments During Scoping

During meetings with the Scoping Committee and at public scoping meetings, there were other topics and concerns consistently mentioned by angling and recreation interests. Generally, FWP believes the Draft UMRRFMP adequately addresses topics a) through e) listed below. FWP considers topic f) an important matter to consider, but not as part of this Management Plan. Topic f) is part of a larger discussion regarding recreation management on the Missouri River and other popular river sections throughout Montana.

- a) There are too many small walleye in Canyon Ferry
- b) Consider stocking forage fish
- c) Concerns that the plan is not adaptable and cannot change quickly enough as the fishery fluctuates
- d) Be more proactive with perch management on Holter
- e) Address habitat needs for perch in Canyon Ferry
- f) Consider seasonal closures in the river below Hauser Dam; limit boat and outfitter use